DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 974 UD 020 921

AUTHOR Fox, William M.; Elder, Nancy
TITLE A Study of Practices and Policies for Discipline and Dropouts in Ten Selected Schools.
PUB DATE Feb 80
NOTE 15p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Discipline; *Discipline Policy; Discipline Problems; Dropout Characteristics; *Dropout Prevention; *Dropout Research; *Potential Dropouts; Questionnaires; School Policy; Secondary Education
IDENTIFIERS New York (North Country)

ABSTRACT

This report reviews the current literature on dropouts and school discipline and discusses a survey of ten North Country high schools used to generate information to be used by schools when re-evaluating policies regarding these issues. Survey data was collected using questionnaires completed by the principals of the ten schools. Recommendations were made based on the literature review and survey results. They include (1) early and systematic identification of potential dropouts, (2) use of in-school suspensions as a disciplinary measure, (3) written guidelines for acceptable student behavior and the consequences if rules are broken, (4) involvement of students, parents, and faculty in the development of school disciplinary policies, and (5) an emphasis on the positive aspects of students' behavior. A checklist to aid early identification of potential dropouts is included. (MK)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

AUG 2 1 1980

ED191974

A Study of Practices and Policies For Discipline and Dropouts In Ten Selected Schools

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
William M. Fox
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

William M. Fox, Ph.D.
and
Nancy Elder
Graduate Assistant
St. Lawrence University
February, 1980

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

CG020921

The purpose of this study was to investigate existing practices and policies pertaining to potential drop-outs and student discipline issues in ten selected North Country high schools. Recent literature on drop-outs and discipline was also examined. It was assumed that by comparing data gathered from selected schools with national norms and with writing published in contemporary educational publications information could be generated which may be useful to schools as current policies and practices are re-evaluated.

The study was conducted by interviewing the principals of ten selected North Country public schools using a seven item questionnaire. (see Table I) The first part of the questionnaire dealt with the drop-out issue. In this case, a drop-out is defined as: a person, grades 7-12, who leaves school before graduating and who does not transfer to another school or accredited institution and who does not enter the military service. The second part of the questionnaire dealt with discipline issues in the schools. The data are complied in Table I.

Recent research studies support the theory that potential drop-outs, students with discipline problems, and students with academic problems are not separate. The causes and effects of these problems are all interrelated.

Students do not make a dramatic decision in one day to drop-out of school. Instead the decision is usually a result of a culmination of events and activities that have taken place during the students' entire schooling experience. (2:47)*

*The first numeral refers to the bibliographical listing at the end of the article. The second numeral refers to page number.

Table 1

	Enrollment 78-79	Dropouts 78-79	Suspensions 78-79	Systematically identify potential dropouts	Has specific program for P.D.	Written discipline code	Students involved in setting discipline policy
1	1029	21	0	no	no	yes	no
2	452	24	6	no	no	yes	no
3	286	5	16	yes	no	no	no
4	1178	42	0	no	no	no	no
5	426	18	85	yes	no	no	yes
6	399	5	22	no	no	yes	no
7	670	18	not recorded	no	no	no	no
8	2284	41	246	no	no	yes	no
9	1484	59	72	no	no	yes	no
10	1129	43	113	no	no	yes	no
Totals	9337	276	560				

The cost of leaving school is high to the community as well as to the leaver himself. Studies have shown that people who do not graduate from high school have an unemployment rate almost double that for high school graduates. Drop out earning potential is significantly lower than graduates. Drop-outs are prone to juvenile delinquency and require a variety of public assistance. (2:45-6)

While the national drop-out rate exceeds 20% the average drop-out rate reported for the ten school districts surveyed was 3%. This supports the findings of a study printed in, Educational Forum, "The Drop-out As A Social Problem" that schools of an intermediate size and location have a greater holding power than small rural and large urban schools.

The literature search showed that a potential drop-out can be identified as early as the end of sixth grade. It has been pointed out that early identification of potential drop-outs is essential. It is necessary to identify potential drop-outs early in order to change the course in which the student is headed. It is almost impossible to dissuade a student who is almost 16 and has verbalized his intentions to drop-out. (4:223)

Indicators of a potential drop-out are: poor grades, poor attendance, lack of involvement in school activities and family history. If the student comes from a family where the parents or a sibling have not graduated from high school, the chance that he will not graduate are greatly increased. (4:226)

While national research shows that early identification of drop-outs is essential only two of the schools surveyed systematically identify potential drop-outs.

One study stated that there is a need for prevention programs that attack chronic school failures and high absenteeism early on. (4:229-31) Of the schools surveyed none had specific programs aimed at serving the potential drop-out.

Students who are not succeeding in school, who do not attend regularly and who are not interested in school activities can also be counted on to have behavior problems. One study showed that at least 25% of all drop-outs had been suspended, and another 20% had been singled out by their teachers as classroom problems. (2:42)

The Children's Defense Fund (1974-75) investigated national data on suspended students and found these factors to be common among suspended students:

- majority of suspensions are for tardiness, smoking, truancy, and disrespect;
- most suspended students have learning disabilities and inadequate academic skills and;
- majority of suspended students are from single parent homes and parents had less than a 10th grade education. (3:442)

The concluding recommendation of the Children's Defense Fund was that school suspension be abolished except in cases of property damage or assault. It was proposed that schools switch to some form of in-school suspension to discipline students. (3:442)

In May 1979 and July 1979, the Commissioner of Education issued three Decisions, after Appeals to him, concerning permanent suspensions due to excessive absences and class cutting. In two of the cases, the Commissioner upheld the school district. In the third case, the parent's appeal was sustained because the district did not follow the suspension proceedings outlined in Education Law. In this case, the student had been advised by the assistant high school principal of her removal from all classes, with the exception of physical education, for the remainder of the school year. Pursuant to Education Law, section 3214 (3) (a), an assistant principal is not authorized to suspend students from class (Matter of Corbett, 12 Education Department Reports, 184; Matter of Sehr, 16 id. 45). Since the removal from classes was for a period in excess of five school days, the suspension could be ordered by the superintendent of schools or the board of education, and an opportunity for a hearing must be provided. (1:2)

Also in 1978-79 Commissioner Gordon Ambach's Student Advisory Committee identified disruptive student behavior in the schools and problems of discipline as their major concern. After conducting a state-wide-survey the committee put together recommendations for a positive approach to discipline. One of the recommendations was to abolish out-of-school suspensions except in cases of violent crimes and replace it with in-school suspension whenever suspension is appropriate.

Despite those recommendations 8 out of the 10 schools surveyed use out of school suspension on a regular basis for infractions such as truancy, smoking and disrespect. One school district stated that it uses out-of-school suspensions when it is necessary to get a parent involved.

The administrator at another school was quoted as saying that, "Suspensions serve no useful purpose." However the majority of the administrators maintained that out-of-school suspensions is a necessary method of discipline.

In one survey students cite parent conferences as the most effective deterent to misconduct. (3:442) All of the schools surveyed involve the parents at some point in the disciplining process. Many of the administrators interviewed pointed out that the majority of parents are very helpful once they are contacted about a student's misbehavior.

Commissioner Ambach's Student Advisory Committee made two other recommenddations which are relevant to this report. Schools should: Compile in writing all rules concerning student conduct and disciplinary practices used by the school and involve representatives of the student body, the faculty and administration in a joint effort to: determine acceptable and unacceptable behavior; establish an enforcement system; and establish mechanisms for handling grievances and appeals.

Of the schools surveyed 6 have a written discipline code. In the schools with a written discipline code 6.7% of the total student body was suspended in 1978-79. In the three schools without discipline codes that use suspension, 8.7% of the total student body was suspended during 1978-79. In the schools with a written discipline code 2.8% dropped-out; while in the schools without a written discipline code 3.2% dropped-out. This data seems to support the idea that a written discipline code may reduce the number of discipline problems and possibly the number of drop-outs in a school.

Of the schools surveyed only one involved the students in setting disciplinary policy. The administrator at that school stated that two students are selected from each grade to act in an advisory capacity concerning school discipline. At the time of the survey another school district was working on a plan to involve parents, students, teacher and administration in a joint effort to solve discipline problems.

None of the schools surveyed involved faculty in setting discipline policy or handling discipline outside of the classroom.

School administration throughout the state find the problem of class cutting perplexing. Class cutting, along with discipline and truancy must be considered and dealt with on a routine basis in the daily administration of a school. Class cutting seems to be on the increase, although we have no hard data to back up this observation. It is certainly mentioned by every administrator we meet. (7:4-5)

Some of the causes of class cutting are as follows:

1. Failure to develop a written set of rules and policies, applicable district wide, which provide for the habitual class cutter, as well as the occasional one.
2. Failure of teachers to take attendance routinely and properly at the beginning of each class period and then to report class cuts to the main office.
3. Failure of school administrators or their assistants to identify students who are cutting a particular class or classes on the day of .
4. Failure to provide timely and adequate discipline to the pupil for illegal class absence.

5. Improper class placement.
6. Societal, home, or peer problems which have not been identified.

To deal appropriately with class cutting is difficult and time consuming. The following procedures are suggestions. They might form an appropriate basis upon which local schools can develop a program appropriate to their own needs.

A. Develop local policies and procedures to deal with unnecessary class absence. These policies should be written and well publicized.

B. Devise procedures for taking attendance each period and reporting unauthorized absences to the school office immediately.

C. Establish a Review Board consisting of an administrator, a teacher, a student, and others. Pupils who are disciplined for illegal absences (absence from class or all day) have a right to appeal to the Board.

D. Notify the parents after each of the first and second class cuts. The classroom teacher should do this. Pupils should be requested to make up the missed work or be assigned appropriate disciplinary action.

E. Consult the pupil's guidance counselor following the third cut. At this stage, a parental conference may be requested or the attendance teacher may confer with parents at their home.

F. Refer to an administrator who should request a parental conference at the school following the fifth cut.

G. Remove from class and assign to a restricted study hall if class cutting continues beyond this point, with no effort on the part of the pupil to correct his absence. Pupil's may appeal to the Review Board if they wish.

It should be noted that no matter what steps are outlined in the policy, staff members have the prerogative of shortcutting it by bringing severe problems to the attention of an administrator and the parents immediately. In addition, such measures as assigning detention, requiring the pupil to make-up missed work and recording a zero as classwork grade for each missed day, may be part of the policy. It is also important that provision be made for referring the pupil to the pupil personnel team serving the district for a case conference and evaluation. This intervention can occur whenever it seems appropriate as the case develops. Finally, pupils under age 16, might be referred to the Family Court for truancy as a Person in Need of Supervision.

Pupils should not be petitioned to Family Court until all in-school efforts and resources have been exhausted. The petition should document these efforts.

Conclusion

Even though this study has shown that the drop-out rate is relatively low in the schools studied, it is to everyones advantage to make the numbers of drop outs even smaller. One way to do this is to identify potential drop-outs early and to do it systemtically rather than to rely on tradition or hunches. Once a potential drop-out is identified the student should be placed in a special program which is designed to keep him in school.

While most of the administrators interviewed felt comfortable with the discipline in their schools, many also felt that there was still room for improvement. The positive aspects of discipline can be emphasized through a greater use of in-school suspensions, a written code of conduct and involvement of students and faculty in the disciplining process.

Recommendations

It is important to identify potential drop-outs at an early age and to do it in a systematic way. An instrument for early identification of potential drop-outs is the Potential Early Leaver Survey (PEL) which is available through BOCES. (see attached copy) It can be administered quickly and it can be used to identify potential drop-out through a list of predictable factors. The factors are broken down into two categories; those outside of the schools control and those within the schools control. Once identified, school personnel can begin to work with potential drop-outs to try to steer them out of the path of early leaving.

It is also recommended that schools continue to move in the direction of in-school suspensions whenever possible. The benefits of in-school suspension are:

-decrease in vandalism in community
-increase in public relations with community and working parents
-increase average daily attendance compensation
-students are required to complete work
-disruptive students are removed from class so others can learn; yet students who want a "holiday" are undermined
-School drop-out rates may decrease (3:443)

In order for an in-school suspension center to be successful it should have these components:

-well staffed

-low student teacher ratio

-teachers should be prompt about sending assignments

-parents must be notified in advance of assignment

-should combine academic tutoring and counseling

-students should be released when behavior improves (4:443)

All schools should have a written set of guidelines for acceptable student behavior and the consequences if rules are broken. Students can function better when they are clearly aware of what is expected of them.

Schools should make an attempt to involve students, parents and faculty in setting and enforcing discipline policy.

There should also be an emphasis on the positive aspect of a student's behavior. When a student's behavior improves his parents should be notified through a phone call or letter. Also verbal exchanges with the student concerning his improved behavior is important.

Predictable Factors of Potential Early School Leavers

These predictors are of two types -- those which can be modified by counselors and students, and those which are beyond their control. If a student has five or more of these twenty predictors there is a eighty per cent chance that the student will drop out of school.

Here is a check list to help you identify Potential Early Leavers.

A. PREDICTORS BEYOND OUR CONTROL

___	1. Age	Two or more years older than classmates
___	2. Physical size	Small or large for class group
___	3. Health	Frequently ill, fatigues easily
___	4. Grade retardation	One or more years retarded
___	5. Father's occupation	Unskilled or semi-skilled
___	6. Parents' educational level	Grade 7 or below
___	7. No. of children in family	Five or more
___	8. School to school transfers	Pattern of jumping from school to school
___	9. Learning rate	Below 90 IQ or 30 percentile
___	10. General adjustment	Fair or poor
___	11. Parents' attitude toward graduation	Negative or vacillating
___	12. Broken home	Absence of father or mother or both from family

B. MODIFIABLE PREDICTORS

___	13. School activities	Little or no participation
___	14. Out of school activities	Little or no participation
___	15. Attendance	Chronic absenteeism (20 or more days/years)
___	16. School marks	Predominantly below C level
___	17. Reaction to school control	Resents controls
___	18. Acceptance of peers	Not liked by fellow students
___	19. Pupil's interest in school work	Little or no interest
___	20. Ability to read	Two or more years below grade level

___ TOTAL If five or more, student is a PEL.

Adapted from Bureau of Guidance, N.Y. State Ed. Dept., How High School Can Reduce Their Dropout Rate, Albany, New York 1964, pp.20-21.

SELECTED REFERENCES

1. Anonymous, Pupil Personnel Services Newsletter, Office of Educational Finance, Management and Social Services Vol VI, No. 3, (Jan/Feb, 1980) p. 2,4,5.

2. Kaplan, Jay L. and Luck, Edward C. "The Drop-out Phenomenon as a Social Problem" Educational Forum v. 42 (Nov. 77) p 41-56.

3. Nielson, Linda, "Let's Suspend Suspensions: Consequences and Alternatives" Personnel and Guidance J. 57 (May 79) p 442-9.

4. Powell, Mary Ann and Anderson, Richard J. "Early Identification of Potential Drop-outs: A Literature Review," Child Welfare (April 78) p 221-31.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Donald, Thomas, "A Curriculum Approach - Solving Discipline Problems Through Law Related Education, "NASSP Bulletin v. 60 (Feb. 76) p 15-19.

2. "Cope An Alternative To School Suspension, " Catalyst For Change v. 5 (winter 76) p 12-15.

3. "High School Discipline Problems and Reading Disability," Reading Horizons (spring 78).

4. Let's Talk Sense About Discipline," Clearing House v. 50 (Mar. 77) p. 309-12.

5. "Positive Approaches Toward Student Discipline," The State Education Dept. Task Force on Student Affairs, Albany, N.Y.

6. "The Problem of Attendance, " NASSP Bulletin v. 60 (Feb, 76) p 15-19.

7. "The Stride Program: An Answer to Absenteeism, " Phi Delta Kappan v. 59 (Jan. 78) p. 348-9.

8. "Suspensions Get Rid of Em!" Thrust For Educational Leadership v. 5 (Oct. 75) p 26-7.

9. "A Volunteer Drop-out Prevention Program," NASSP Bulletin v. 62 (Jan. 78) p 91-7.